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The Night after the Battle.

The Night after the Battle,

WRITTEN FOR AND READ BEFORE

THE OHIO COMMANDERY OF THE LOYAL LEGION,

—BY—

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JULY 11th, 1883.

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Cincinnati, O.

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Vain was the chief's, the sage's pride !
They had no poet, and they died ;
In vain they schem'd, in vain they bled !
They had no poet, and are dead.

Horace Bk. IV. Ode IX.
Pope Vol. II, Page 86.

SONGS OF THE DYING UPON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

A brave Captain in one of our western regiments told us his story as we were taking him to the hospital. A rifle bullet had passed through his thighs, making a mortal wound. While lying on the field he suffered from intense thirst. He said :

“ By and by night fell, and the stars shone out from the
“ clear sky in radiant beauty over the dark field, and I began
“ to think of the great God who had given his son to die a
“ death of agony for me, that he was above the sky, above the
“ scene of suffering, above the glorious stars : and I felt I was
“ going home, going up there to meet Him, and that I ought
“ to praise Him even dying on the battle-field. I could not
“ help singing. There was a comrade in the brush near me.
“ I could not see, but I could hear him. He too began to
“ sing, and beyond him another caught the strain, and another
“ and another took it up all over the terrible battle-field, until
“ we made the echoes of the night ring with our singing.”

Moore's Rebellion Record, Vol. VII.
Poetry and Incidents, page 35.

The Night after the Battle.

'Twas such a day ! no human tongue can tell
A tithe of all that in its hours befell,
No painter's art with colors true portray
The valiant deeds of heroes in the fray.

The sunset flamed o'er clouds of red and gold,
The cheering harbinger that widely told,
To loyal troops by rugged war distraught,
The triumph great, declining day had brought.
In one more gallant charge th' undaunted band
Unites each heart and every sinewy hand
To sweep from chosen ground the sturdy foe,
And with the crowning vict'ry all aglow,
Unfurl the colors on the captured height,
Where the advance is stayed by falling night.
The beaten squadrons, from the hated field,
Compelled by valor inch by inch to yield,
In formless rushing crowds away stampede,
In blind dismay, where narrow pathways lead,
Where each on each treads in the tangled throng,
With aching limbs the tiresome roads prolong,
Through gloom, and mire, and dark, curses and moans,
And countless mut'rings gathered into groans,
And yet a secret whisper in the heart
That theirs the pleasing fate was to depart
Alive from the dread field whence all the day
Unpitied death swept hecatombs away.

The whole earth rings,
The victor sings,
Forgetting pain,
In proud disdain,
With shouts and yells,
He loudly tells,
The fighting done,
The triumph won;
The Nation's star
Shines bright afar,
Across the night,
And rests its light,
From out a rift,
Of cloudy drift,
On banners torn,
Defiant borne,
Through shot and shell,
O'er hill and dell:
Its soft caresses
Our ensign blesses.

The roar of cannon dies through wooded glen,
Returning peals of malice, now and then,
Through narrow defiles, and afresh rebounds
From distant rocks, in churlish fitful rounds.
The sulphur smoke in long and drooping shrouds
Pervades the heavy air in stifling clouds,
A sickly odor from warm blood exhales
In sunless woods, and through the soggy vales,
And soon a silence, painfully profound,
Usurps the realm of battles clashing sound.
A cooling wind comes from the east apace,
Dissolves the clouds, and drives them from the place,
Relieves the suf'ring with refreshing breath,
And softens pangs of unrelenting death.
The rounded moon with mellow radiance mild,
Adorns the spots where honored dead are piled,

And stars by twinkles seem to say, in prattle,
That heaven's gates stand open during battle.
As far as brilliant moonlight leads the sight,
Is strewn the tangled debris of the fight,
In strange confusion, over many miles,
The dead and wounded mingle in the piles
Of broken guns, swords, musketry and ball,
Exploded shot or shell, as might befall
Beneath the shadows where they softly lie,
Or on the open underneath the sky.
Alone in gore and pain the wounded lay,
Or crawl for water whereso'er they may,
No helping hand approaches at their call,
No footstep breaks the stillness with its fall,
No sister's care bids smarting aches relent,
No mother's voice affords encouragement,
By God alone the dying prayer is heard,
And scarce the air by parting words is stirred,
The tender messages of love are told
To ears of comrades who are dead and cold,
And gifts of sweet remembrance vainly sent
By hands whose vital spark of life is spent.

Among the trampled clover, on a knoll,
Where purest rays of light by preference stole,
Amid dead comrades of the First Reserve,
That never had by fire been made to swerve,
A wounded soldier lay, with fainting breath,
Averse to know the sure approach of death.
His brown hair fell in ringlets o'er his eyes,
His beardless cheeks were flushed with death's surprise,
His pallid face with hope addressed the sky
Whose genial lights his features beautify,
No earthly succor coming to his pains,
Implores relief and to the stars complains ;

And must I die in this sad way,
Ere manhood is begun,
'Tis but the prelude to the play,
My course cannot be run.

My heart is full of hope and trust
The coming years will crown,
I do not feel that it is just
So soon to be cut down.

I've had no chance to test my nerve,
Or make my merit known,
'Tis best for boys to show reserve,
And wait till they are grown.

There's much at home that needs my care
For Father too was killed,
When peace is made I must prepare
The farm to be well tilled.

The children must be sent to school,
I must take Father's place,
The neighbors look to me to rule
And keep them from disgrace.

I cannot die so young and strong,
I have too much at stake,
Poor Mother cannot get along
I'm sure her heart will break.

It seems as if I hear her song,
And in its pause her sob,
It is a shameless cruel wrong
A mother's love to rob.

It must be so! then I resign,
My country, God obey,
To them my holy cause consign,
My life blood ebbs away.

My life, its hopes, and duty, all,
None can bring richer store,
I'm proud I can obey the call,
I wish I could give more :

For ev'ry nation there is some defense,
A mountain range shields one from violence,
Upon a sea-girt island one remains
In peace whilst Nature all her foes restrains,
One keeps a vast establishment of arms,
And one by state-craft shrewdly voids all harms,
But she alone can boast a proud defiance
Whose loyal youth become her wise reliance.

Beside a fallen fence upon the right,
Where level meadows with a hill unite,
Upon whose face and crown a heavy wood,
A safe protection for the marksmen stood,
Whose sides were flanked on right and left by mounds,
From which the cannon swept the lower grounds,
Where fresh brigades repeated charge on charge
And massed their dead along the meadows marge,
Embraced in death twin brothers fondly lay,
One clothed in blue, the other dressed in gray.

A narrow strip of ground unfit for use
With thorns, pits, briars, stones and burrs profuse,
Along the margin of the fallow land,
Remained untutored by the farmers hand.
In torturing pain on this vexatious earth,
Expired a youth of gentle, city birth,
To honors maxims he was always true,
To God and man according what was due ;
The greatest soul might well recoil from death
Alone, at night, in anguish on that heath ;
For his release no wonder he should crave,
And yet he sings undaunted, true and brave ;

Mighty Lord of battle come,
Take me to Thy peaceful home,
Hold my hand to Thy hand clinging,
Hark! I hear Thy soldiers singing,
Loose this fevered, mangled flesh,
Give me living waters fresh.

Thou the gift bestowed on me,
Gladly I return it Thee,
Life was mine for earthly using,
Blame me not for its abusing,
Ev'ry day I've done my best,
Trusting Mercy to be blessed.

Give the Nation stable life,
Make her stronger by this strife,
Write her deeds like Sacred Story,
Mingling, sharing with Thy glory,
Bleeding, hoping, rising, grown,
Now the cross, and soon the crown.

A modest cottage trellised round with vines,
Upon the hillside nestled near some pines,
Its whitened fence, and in the yard a swing,
Its beaten pathway leading to the spring,
Its snowy curtains, drooping half a screen
For the interior beautifully clean,
Its gaily pictured walls, and ashen floor,
Its porch and seats beside the open door,
Complete the remnants of a shattered home
Whose inmates, scattered, straying, beggars roam.
Among the flowers in the garden plot,
A soldier had received a fatal shot,
He caught the story that the cottage told,
He heard the mourning of his own household,
As flitted strangely through his dying thought,
The mingled horrors civil war had wrought,

And spent the dwindling moments of his life
In writing lamely to his patriot wife
Upon the furlough which he would not take,
For some kind hand to forward for her sake :

No more beside the window Mary wait
From me tidings,
Ere death relax my grasp let me relate
Your forbodings.

Arrange the precious children round your knee,
Calmly kneeling,
My dying blessing be pronounced by thee,
God's annealing :

Their shield and guide, their mother's dauntless
heart,
Comrades warding,
Their rank and pride, in civil war my part,
Freedom guarding.

Before some cabins where he bravely fought,
And earned the worthy mention which he sought
Among the honored names his country bears
Upon the breastplate which she proudly wears,
A negro fell, his front upon his foes,
On whom his valiant hand had rained its blows.
His brawny frame for feats of strength was made,
His features coarse, no cultured thought displayed,
His placid eye evinced the patient faith
That fairly triumphs even over death,
But one conception fills his simple mind,
But that the noblest given to mankind,
Religion joins the world in brotherhood,
Exalting man to God in likelihood,

How happy all of brilliant minds possessed,
If they some negro's piety professed,
How many weak by him have been made strong,
How fearless this stout soldier chants his song :

Slowly on the moments travel,
Silently God's schemes unravel,
Deeper than the thoughts of men,
Higher than the angels ken,
Mightier than a nations sword,
All obey His ruling word.

Kingdoms fall at His command,
Failing empires firmly stand,
Curses into blessings change,
Mocking into praising, strange,
Naught impedes His high design,
Born and wrought in love divine.

Light and heat the sun bestows,
On all alike where'er it glows,
Love of Freedom swells each breast,
Born thus equal to the rest,
None may dare God's gift efface,
Sharing even in His grace.

Soon the happy day appears,
Surely coming through the years,
All of us shall then be free,
Oh ! that I that day could see,
Ringing day of jubilee
Shine thy morning light on me.

As black as raven's wing his flowing hair,
With eyes to match, his skin was not unfair,
His features finely cut in perfect lines,
His form and size were such as blood refines,

His neatly fitting suit of homespun gray,
Was not impressive of a vain display.
He bore himself in captivating mien,
For fear his soul, his conduct might demean,
Long time ago his harried fathers fled
The wrongs religious bigotry had bred.
Through all his annals and his precepts ran
The truths that mark him a republican,
And yet in evil hour he quite forgot
The noble duty of the Huguenot.
Confronting death this splendid warrior spent
His latest breath upon this sad lament.

My judgement clears in dissolution's gloom
And marks my sad mistake a traitor's doom,
With cunning sophistry, inwrought with lies,
Concealing fearful wrongs in truth's disguise,
The selfish schemers led away my heart,
Curses forever on their wicked art,
The whole earth round no milder rule obtained,
No stronger arm her subject's rights maintained,
I was not burdened with unjust restraint,
I had no cause in reason for complaint,
My country's heritage of fame was mine,
Round hers my future might in grandeur twine,
What cruel fate that I should die the tool
Of ingrate rebels against such a rule :
He who would organize a stable state
Must find a cause in justice adequate,
Nor lay the corner stone on human slavery
For fear Gods wrath should crush his flagrant knavery.

From all who fell, or fought, thus led astray,
A noble Nation wipes the guilt away,
Kindly excusing, though all law forbid it,
Because she felt "through ignorance they did it."

At midnight perched upon the topmost bough,
Upon the oak that graced the mountain's brow

And raised its giant branches far above
The trees around it in the little grove,
A mocking bird gazed on the solemn scene,
Now in a piteous. now a joyful mien,
In wonder lost at first to understand
Whence came such venom in a christian land,
And then inspired by seeing heroes yield
Their lives for Freedom on the battle-field,
In mute surprise, now turning to the sky,
And on the carnage now intent its eye,
Amazed to hear the dying soldiers sing,
Attunes its voice, and makes the welkin ring :

How level now the rank of all,
When side by side the great and small,
Return to clay :
What matters which gave chief command,
Or which was called a contraband,
On yesterday.

His children's and his widow's heart,
By equal grief is made to smart,
Who loose their friend,
Or if the silver stars he wore,
Or patiently a musket bore
To life's flit end.

To estimate with prudent care,
And give to each his rightful share,
Of sacred fame,
Where each gave all he had to give,
Each should the same esteem receive
In Freedom's name.

The world with rare munificence,
Applauds the slain in Truth's defence
A few brief days,
And then as is their fitting due,
To fresher feats and actors new
Her tribute pays.

But just and true the record book,
Where God himself delights to look,
Transcendent sight!
There every name, with all its deeds,
Appears in forms from which proceeds
A living light.

The busy angels fill their records bright
With touching tales like these through all the night,
And o'er their pages in the after years,
Thousands will pore with swelling hearts and tears,
Whilst other thousands sing sincere applause,
And plotting tyrants dwell in studious pause.

'Twas long before the morning star arose,
The eager army quit its short repose,
With haste adjusts its decimated files,
And into column for the march detiles,
For fallen comrades brushing back a tear,
For future victories sending up a cheer.

Upon the roadside where he crowned his fame,
Beneath a tree on which they cut his name,
An aged man by cooling breezes led,
Had crawled in pain to find a dying bed.
From underneath his gray locks falling lank,
The silver eagles told his army rank,
Through all the features of his noble mien
The rank that Nature gave was clearly seen,
To him his willing neighbors yield command
Because he answered all the laws demand,
From him the country people sought advice,
To him mechanics brought each new device,
The village rulers looked to him to guide,
The pious churchmen spoke of him with pride,
The homeless orphan thanked him for his care,
The needy poor shared in his bounteous fare,

Admiring Nature round his thrifty place,
Displayed her beauty with most charming grace,
Within his home, like ceaseless altar-light,
Domestic love gave ever fresh delight.
The old man heard the passing column's cheer
Upon the night air ringing far and clear,
Essayed to raise his head upon his hand
And with the other beckoned in command :

Press to the front, my comrades, one and all,
Press to the front, where dangers thickest fall,
No blood of coward skulks along your veins,
No trait'rous thought your sturdy minds restrains,
From ev'ry hamlet where a freeman dwells,
The voice of Freedom's earnest pleading swells
Press to the front, where dangers thickest fall,
'Tis not for men like you to shun the call,
The Union's cause in union's might defend,
The noble deeds of honored sires transcend,
The rights of children with your lives maintain,
The hands of traitors with your fire restrain,
Press to the front, my comrades, never fear
The cost of valor, howsoever dear,
Accept a mangled frame, deaf, blind, or lame,
But live the sons of Freedom and of Fame,
To see your country proudly take her place
Of all the first to bless the human race,
And hear the thrilling story of her love,
For all her sons who loyal patriots prove,
Or die, if such shall be your happy fate,
And leave a name forever fortunate,
To grow in honor with increasing time,
Approved, admired, beloved, revered, sublime,
Press to the front, dear comrades, strike again,
The Sovereign Union sovereign shall remain.
No more, my neighbor lads, I lead no more,
Spirit of Freedom blest, I thee adore,

Press to the front ! my spirit takes its flight,
Press to the front ! I see the Eternal Light.

The impulsive soldiers from the column press,
Around the lifeless form of manliness,
Within the circle, kneeling on the ground,
His " neighbor lads " bend low in grief profound.
In solemn silence all give sorrow sway,
A brief and bitter moment, then away
To conflicts new, in this stern mood they speed,

Press to the front ! thy mandate, Sire, we heed,
And swear by all the oaths of all the free,
By that Eternal Light that beamed on thee,
Consuming fire the sentence shall maintain,
Our Sovereign Union sovereign shall remain.

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